

TO: CO-CHAIR JOSEPH P. GRESKO, CO-CHAIR CHRISTINE COHEN, VICE CHAIR CHRISTINE PALM, VICE CHAIR DEREK SLAP AND MEMBERS OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: NAN ZYLA-WISENSALE, Dr.P.H.

RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 5293, WITH AMENDMENT, AN ACT PROHIBITING THE USE OF WILD OR EXOTIC ANIMALS IN TRAVELING ANIMAL ACTS

DATE: MARCH 14, 2022

It is noteworthy that the 100-year-old Ringling Brothers Circus was shut down in 2017 due to falling ticket sales as a result of public pressure in opposition to the maltreatment of animals in the traveling circus. Several states (NJ, NY, HI, IL, CO, CA) have implemented statewide bans on traveling circuses.

This act has been referred to as “Beulah’s Law,” in reference to an elephant who had been born in the wild in Myanmar, was captured from her family and sold to the owners of the Commerford Zoo in Goshen, Connecticut, a traveling zoo. Before collapsing and dying in 2019, she had experienced repeated episodes in which she had collapsed, but was still forced to perform. Her companion elephant, Minnie, currently remains at the Commerford Zoo as the solitary elephant. Since elephants are highly social animals, existing alone constitutes a stressful situation of deprivation.

National Geographic published an article under the heading “Roadside zoo elephants suffered for years before dying, new records reveal; animal advocates say weak laws and insufficient enforcement are to blame for continued poor welfare at U.S. roadside zoos.” A focus of this article is the Commerford Zoo:

“Beulah had been giving rides, providing photo opportunities and performing with the zoo since 1973, collapsed and died from blood poisoning from a uterine infection at a fair in Massachusetts in September 2019. She had uterine infections and suspected tumors for ten years before her death, according to the records. An anonymous complaint filed with the USDA asserts that the day she died, Beulah collapsed three times and each time was made to stand up.”

African elephants are now listed on the Critically Endangered IUCN Red List (the International Union for Conservation of Nature listing as of March 25, 2021). A recent lawsuit brought by the Animal Legal Defense Fund resulted in the release of animals from a roadside zoo in Pennsylvania due to violations of the Endangered Species Act.

Elephants and other animals held captive in zoos have specific requirements for maintaining an adequate level of their physical and mental health. Most zoos, as unnatural environments, are unable to provide proper care. Elephants are nomadic animals, and as such require large amounts of space to traverse, as well as exercise. Most zoos are unable to fulfill such requirements, and Minnie’s living situation falls far short in these categories. Social interaction with others of her species, a crucial aspect of life for elephants, is entirely lacking. The National Geographical article quoted above states, “based on drone footage, it is believed Minnie spends most of her time indoors in a concrete stall.”

I strongly urge you as members of the Environment Committee to pass HB 5293, with the amendment on line 33 to remove “includes any animal that is not domesticated,” because this line may be used as a

loophole to exclude wild animals bred, born, or raised in captivity. I am inserting below a link to the National Geographic article referenced above.

National Geographic article

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/new-records-reveal-suffering-of-roadside-zoo-elephants-in-the-united-states>